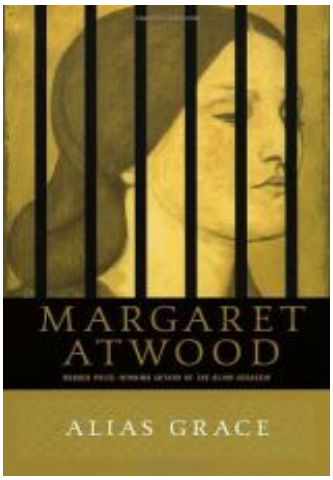
Alias Grace

by Margaret Atwood



About the Book

In **Alias Grace**, bestselling author Margaret Atwood has written her most captivating, disturbing, and ultimately satisfying work since **The Handmaid's Tale**. She takes us back in time and into the life of one of the most enigmatic and notorious women of the nineteenth century.

Grace Marks has been convicted for her involvement in the vicious murders of her employer, Thomas Kinnear, and Nancy Montgomery, his housekeeper and mistress. Some believe Grace is innocent; others think her evil or insane. Now serving a life sentence, Grace claims to have no memory of the murders.

Dr. Simon Jordan, an up-and-coming expert in the burgeoning field of mental illness, is engaged by a group of reformers and spiritualists who seek a pardon for Grace. He listens to her story while bringing her closer and closer to the day she cannot remember. What will he find in attempting to unlock her memories? Is Grace a female fiend? A bloodthirsty femme fatale? Or is she the victim of circumstances?

Discussion Guide

1. This novel is rooted in physical reality, on one hand, and floats free of it on the other, as Atwood describes physical things in either organic, raw terms (the "tongue-colored settee") or with otherworldly, more ephemeral images (the laundry like "angels rejoicing, although without any heads"). How do such descriptions deepen and reinforce the themes in the novel?

2. The daily and seasonal rhythm of household work is described in detail. What role does this play in the novel in regard to its pace?

3. What was your view of Mary Whitney before you met her in chapter 18? During the time she was working with Grace

at Mrs. Alderman Parkinson's? When you hear of her again? Do the earliest references and asides about her illuminate her role in the novel later?

4. Atwood employs two main points of view and voices in the novel. Do you trust one more than the other? As the story progresses, does Grace's voice (in dialogue) in Simon's part of the story change? If yes, how and why?

5. Grace's and Simon's stories are linked and they have a kinship on surface and deeper levels. For instance, they both eavesdrop or spy as children, and later, each stays in a house that would have been better left sooner or not entered at all. Discuss other similarities or differences in the twining of their stories and their psyches.

6. Discuss the importance and use of dreams in the novel.

7. Atwood offers a vision of the dual nature of people, houses, appearances, and more. Discuss these manifestations of dark and light that are at bedrock in this novel.

8. Discuss how Atwood foreshadows certain events by dropping clues throughout the novel. Did you find key events surprising and inevitable?

9. In a letter to his friend Dr. Edward Murchie, Simon Jordan writes that "...*Not to know*--to snatch at hints and portents, at intimations, at tantalizing whispers--it is as bad as being haunted..." How are the characters in this story affected by the things they don't know?

10. Were you of the same mind regarding Grace's innocence or guilt throughout the novel? At what points did you waver one way or the other?

11. Did any character in the novel freely choose his or her course of action?

12. Why do you suppose the book is titled **Alias Grace**?

Author Bio

Margaret Atwood is the author of more than 50 books of fiction, poetry and critical essays. Her novels include CAT'S EYE, THE ROBBER BRIDE, ALIAS GRACE, THE BLIND ASSASSIN and the *MaddAddam* trilogy. Her 1985 classic, THE HANDMAID'S TALE, was followed in 2019 by a sequel, THE TESTAMENTS, which was a global #1 bestseller and won the Booker Prize.

Atwood has won numerous awards, including the Arthur C. Clarke Award for Imagination in Service to Society, the Franz Kafka Prize, the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade, the PEN America Lifetime Achievement Award, and the Dayton Literary Peace Prize. In 2019, she was made a member of the Order of the Companions of Honour for services to litera-ture. She lives in Toronto.

Critical Praise

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